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Description of Patagonia

by

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DESCRIPCION
DE LA
COSTA MERIDIONAL DEL SUR
LLAMADA VULGARMENTE
PATAGONICA;
RELACION
DE SUS TERRENOS, PRODUCCIONES, BRUTOS, AVES Y PECES; INDIOS QUE LA HABITAN, SU RELIGION, COSTUMBRES, VESTIDOS Y TRATO;
DESDE
EL PUERTO DE SANTA ELENA EN 44 GRADOS,
HASTA
EL DE LA VIRGEN EN 52,
Y BOCA
DEL ESTRECHO DE MAGALLANES.
REFIERESE
CUANTO EN DICHA COSTA Y TIERRA CAMINÓ Y RECONOCIÓ POR SI D. ANTONIO DE VIEDMA, EN EL TIEMPO DE SU DESTINO EN AQUELLOS ESTABLECIMIENTOS, Y SU PARTICULAR COMISION EN EL DE SAN JULIAN, CON LAS DEMAS NOTICIAS QUE PUDO ADQUIRIR DE LOS INDIOS.

DESCRIPTION
OF THE
SOUTHERN SHORES OF THAT REGION OF THE SOUTH
COMMONLY CALLED PATAGONIA;
AN ACCOUNT OF ITS
LANDS, PRODUCTS, ANIMALS, BIRDS & FISH; INDIANS WHO INHABIT IT, THEIR RELIGION, CUSTOMS, DRESS AND BEHAVIOR;
FROM
THE HARBOR OF SANTA ELENA, LATITUDE 44 DEGREES SOUTH
TO
THAT OF LA VIRGEN, LATITUDE 52 DEGREES SOUTH
AND MOUTH
OF THE STRAITS OF MAGELLAN.
IN WHICH REFERENCE
IS MADE TO
ALL DON ANTONIO DE VIEDMA TRAVERSED AND EXPLORED ON HIS OWN ACCOUNT IN SAID REGION DURING THE TERM OF HIS ASSIGNMENT TO THOSE PARTS AND HIS SPECIAL COMMISSION TO THE SETTLEMENT OF SAN JULIAN, TOGETHER WITH OTHER INFORMATION WHICH HE WAS ABLE TO GATHER FROM THE INDIANS.

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DESCRIPTION OF THE SOUTHERN COAST OF THAT REGION OF THE SOUTH COMMONLY CALLED PATAGONIA

The harbor of Santa Elena is a good one for all types of ships and
133 is situated on the 46° line of southern latitude. Sweet water is to be found only in a glade to the west, filled by the winter rains as they are held by
[134] a ridge which lies across the glade's mouth near the beach. Inland, some four or five leagues, the Indians reported the presence of some small
[135] springs. All the terrain is rocky except for the small valleys, in which
[136] there is good grass and an abundance of espinillo firewood. The Indian
[137] chief who rules this section is called Ayen; his jurisdiction stretches up to the harbor of San Gregorio. He said that from the coast westward toward the mountains there are some 70 leagues of habitable land, but the land beyond that limit is absolutely uninhabitable by man or beast.
138 Hares are very abundant here, being like small deerlops and very good to eat; quirquinchos, [type of armadillo—Translator] also good eating,
[139] have shells which the Indians use as pans or pipkins; pumas have flesh which is very savory, juicy and tender, and is like the roasted breast of a turkey; there are a few guanacos too, some partridges and many
[140] ostriches. The Indians subsist on all of these, as also on horse meat, which they have in great abundance and which is their favorite food. Fish, in which the harbor abounds, is of the kind which we call lenguado and pejerey, both of which are delicious.

143 The harbor of San Gregorio is situated at 45° 4' latitude south. It is not very secure and its entrance is bad owing to its rock strewn bottom and weak anchorage. The terrain which surrounds it is rocky and rugged; one must go inland some 5 leagues [6?] before striking water. The mountain chain is about as far from this harbor as it is from that of
[141] Santa Elena, according to the Indians. This land is even more sterile
[142] than the former. The Indian chief who controls these lands is called
[143] Gorgon. The game and fish are the same as in the previous place but the Indians do not eat the fish since they do not know how to catch them and lack the necessary implements for doing so. In the cove called Cazaveros there is an abundance of shrimp, as there is also in San Julian and Puerto Deseado, and a kind of fish called golfo; but as already mentioned, the Indians do not make use of them. There is here quite a lot
[144] of espinillo firewood, and the rock is very solid and hard.

The gulf of San Jose is south of cape Marian, which is at the same
145 latitude as San Gregorio; from the point at which its mouth begins to cape Blanco, there are 30 leagues. The northern shores have been explored by small ships to a point about 40 leagues to the west. There are

many bayous there, presented by numerous islands and sandbanks. The coast is not so high, but the land is even more barren than that of the other harbors, there being neither water nor grass, although firewood is not altogether lacking, especially inland. The Indians said that the gulf continues toward the west almost up to the mountains, that some springs flow into it there and that it is impossible to cross the mountains to the other side. They added that there is much espinillo brushwood in the region, going from north to south, through which they have cut paths in order to get through, and should they ever deviate from these paths, they become lost. The southern shores of the gulf, they say, are more arid than the northern, but the fauna is the same as in the others. The Indian chiefs who rule this territory are two brothers, called Chaigpas and Edu.

Puerto Deseado is situated at 47° 48' of southern latitude; it is a good harbor but of difficult entry because of the narrowness of its mouth and the violence of the currents which flow in it. The coast is very high and craggy; there is firewood and in the gullies there are some small springs of sweet but slightly brackish water, some 14 in all, which can take care of any need. Geese in the same as it was in the other ports; there are innumerable sea lions and seals and an abundance of guanacos. The chief who controls these lands is called Ulquiquenque; he said that the mountain chain is about 20 "sleeps" from the harbor, which must be about 70 leagues, and also that it is impossible to cross over to the other side, that his people have never crossed nor seen other Indians cross the mountains. In this district there is white, black, red and other colored rock, and a little marble in small broken pieces. [66] The earth also is of various colors and the Indians use it to make their paints. There are also many seals and sea lions on the islands in the haven.

The harbor of San Julian is located at 49° 21' of southern latitude and is the best on the coast, although the entrance to it is difficult for an unpracticed person because of the bank at its mouth and two others which are inside. The terrain also is the best on the whole coast, not at all rocky and more fertile, as we found out when we were there the three years which the settlement lasted from 1781 to 1784 [sic]. The closest source of water is about a league from the beach, and is made up of some wells filled by the overflow from a spring which lies about a league and a half away. There is ample firewood in all the dells, all of which also abound in grass and water, the terrain being made up almost entirely of such gullies, and of mossless hills. The mountain chain is 70 leagues away toward the west, and at its base are these cove-like depressions in each of which there is a lake fed by the snow which melts on the mountain tops. I explored this region at the foot of the mountains

entirely and could find no pass, it being impossible even for the animals to cross over to the other side, all passages being closed off by snow most of which has frozen solid and is, as it were, petrified. This finding made plausible the assertion which the Indians make to the effect that they have never crossed the mountains here or in any of the other places already named. From the first of the three lakes mentioned there flows a small river which runs into the haven of Santa Cruz; from the second, located to the south of the first, springs the stream which the Indians call Chalia, which flows into the Rio Grande de Santa Cruz; the last and southernmost of the three lakes gives birth to the Rio Grande de Santa Cruz, which flows into the haven of the same name, situated at 50° 12' of southern latitude. The chief who lives in this district, which comprises the land between Puerto Deseado and the Rio de Santa Cruz [sic], is called Camelo, and we called him Julian. He is one of the chiefs with the largest following in his nation; his lieutenant is a son-in-law of his called Onos, and he lives in the vicinity of the Santa Cruz lakes.

Fifteen leagues from the Santa Cruz river there is another stream, fed by the mountain snows, which runs in that area and turns toward the Straits of Magellan. This stream flows into the cove named Gallegos and is not navigable, reports of other ancient travelers to the contrary. At 52° of southern latitude is the Cabo de las Virgenes, and the Straits of Magellan start there. The mountains come down so close to the very Straits, at its mid point, that even here it is impossible to reach [67] the other side by land. There are here a number of small snow-fed streams, an abundance of firewood and good grasslands which support the infinite number of guanacos that live in the region. The Indian chief who governs these lands is called Coopan. He is one of those having the largest following, but all his people travel on foot, the tents and small belongings being transported by dogs. Only the chief and his women have horses, which are supplied to them by their neighbor Camelo, chief of San Julian. This state of affairs has existed for some years, in fact since Camelo invaded this territory and took away all the horses. Since the invasion it has been his policy to supply chief Coopan and his wives with horses, but no one else, and in this way he is able to keep his southern neighbors under his control. Horseless, they hunt guanacos on foot, and as there are many of these animals they are able to live pretty well in this territory. In Puerto Deseado and in San Julian a good many of these animals also live, yet not as many, and there the Indians can hunt them with greater ease since they have horses; but then again, the Indians here in the more southern part who lack horses are themselves more agile and robust. In

136 all the harbors of this coast there is an abundance of birds: both seabirds and amphibious ones, such as ducks, seagulls, cormorants, chorlitos, bandurrias, some abutardas and pajaros-niños; there are also some swans, and inland there are partridges, sparrows and some dark colored birds with red breasts; there are also vultures and all kinds of birds of prey. Foxes and black-and-white skunks abound, the urine which the latter give off having the most vile smelling odor imaginable, extending over an enormous area. From the Santa Cruz river south to the Straits there are a few deer.

132 The climate here is cold, but it keeps to a regular seasonal cycle; it rains but little. The winds usually blow from the north, west or south, and are ordinarily violent and make the region uncomfortable, but they are very healthful.

[119] The Indians in these quarters are all of one nation; they are tall,
142 their height varying from six feet to nine spans for the men, there rarely being any taller than this. The women are not so tall, but are enough so in proportion to their sex. All are handsome, and among the women there are some who are very good-looking and white skinned, although tanned by the wind and sun like the men. There is not to be found a thin man or woman, rather are they all thick-set in proportion to their height, which, combined with their habit of going about enveloped in skins from neck to feet, may possibly have contributed to the reports of travelers that they were giants.

[194] Their language is guttural and they are in the habit of repeating
195 the same word over and over in their conversations. They do not inter-
537 rupt the one who may be speaking even though [68] his speech lasts all day. Ordinarily the speaker is one of greater authority than the others
[542] present, or else of greater eloquence. The women do not speak among the men unless questioned, and then they only answer the question. Those who speak often without occasion and inanely are not well considered, and are not even listened to.

391 The dress of the men is made of guanaco, skunk or hare skins, six
[63] feet square, the fur turned inward and the hide painted red, green or yellow. This garment covers them from neck to feet in such a way that only rarely does one see any part of the body other than the arms, and these only when they are in use. They wear also another garment under the outer one, of very soft leather, tied at the waist with a thong, which covers the belly and reaches halfway down the thighs, from which place it tapers to a point which reaches as far as the ankles. Their feet are covered with hide which they secure with thongs; this footgear is of ox hide if they can procure it, and if not, then of the hide of a horse or of a full-grown

[i.e., ca. six feet nine inches. - Analyst]

guanaco, and is sandal-like in appearance. For riding they use boots 291
made from the hocks or legs of horses or large guanacos, and their spurs [492]
are of wood which they carve with no little art. They bind their fore- 302
heads with a band of wool about two fingers wide, woven by themselves
and of several colors. These bands hold the hair in place, that is, swept
upward on the left side with the ends free like the feathers of a bird.
These bands, bound six or eight times about the head, have small pieces
of yellow metal or brass at their extremities. When they mount their 492
horses they tie their large outer garment about the waist with a thong, from
which hang their bolas and knife, which are the weapons they usually [411]
carry, and when they require freedom of movement for their arms they
allow their skin garment to fall backward onto the horse's rump, and be-
ing thus bare from the waist up they present a rather pleasing spectacle
as they race off or pursue game, particularly as the hide entirely covers
the horse's rear quarters and offers to view its inner, multicolored fur.
Their riding gear consists of a sort of packsaddle, with neither saddlebow
nor crupper, and made of the hide of a large guanaco, the pads stuffed
with coarse, dry grasses. The stirrups, which are carved out of wood,
are so small that the large toe will hardly fit into it. They sit somewhat
clumsily on their horses, but securely nevertheless, and can race up or
down hill with equal ease. The horse's bit is made from a slender stick
or from the wing bone of an ostrich, and has a small knob at either end;
it is as long as the horse's mouth is wide, and the reins are attached to
its enlarged extremities as are also two small thongs which go about the
horse's chin and keep the bit from slipping out of its mouth. [69] The
reins are made of eight twisted strands of very thin and pliable rawhide.

The women's clothes are made of the same kinds of skins as are 291
the men's and are worn in the same manner, but for one small difference
which is that they fasten the garment with two large wooden or iron pins
over the chest in such a way that the two upper ends of the hide hang like
the flaps of a cloak down as far as the waist. The other two ends of the
hide hang behind in the manner of a train about half a yard long. This [481]
hangs to the ground when the women are still but when they walk they
gather it up in their left hand. They do not use their left hand for any- [834]
thing else, unless it be to shield their parts in some unforeseen circum-
stance. In addition to this they wear, beneath the aforementioned hide,
a sort of square apron which reaches to below the knees, made of flannel,
woolen stuff or some other cloth if they can get it, and if not, then of
very soft leather. This apron they tie about the waist with a thong, which
those women of some authority adorn with beads. They do not wear [531 554]
sandals on their feet as do the men, but when they ride they put on boots
similar to those the men wear. They do not cover their heads, but 302

parting their hair down the middle, braid it into two pigtails which, coming down over the ears and shoulders reach the chest and waist. The ribbon with which they tie these braids is made of dark wool two fingers wide, and the rich women trim them with beads on special days. They also put beads on the large pins which secure their outer skin garments, on the lower part of their legs as anklets and about their necks as chokers of different colors. They wear brass earrings, and so do the men. The equipment which the women use for riding - and they usually ride mares - includes a kind of stuffed saddle of tanned cowhide (if they can get it), very well made, studded with little brass nails and adorned at either end with beads of varied colors (when they have them) arranged in designs and patterns of their fashioning. The cinch about the horse's belly has three metal rings, one at one end and the other two a third of the distance from either end. The buckle with which they attach and tighten this girth is very large. The bridle is made up of halter, bit and reins; the halter is richly decorated, adorned with beads and anything else they can get hold of for the purpose. The reins and bit are similar to those used by the men. The mares are further adorned about their necks with strings of bells or such other baubles as the women can procure. These necklaces reach down to the animals knees and are used only on special days. On ordinary trips they are replaced by ropes of blue or red wool, about a finger in thickness, which are wound about the animal's neck three times, and which aid the women to get up onto their saddles. [70] The women sit on their saddles facing the head of their mount and folding their legs under them, a very uncomfortable posture which long habit alone allows them to take, and which exposes them to numerous falls. While riding and while mounting they are extraordinarily modest and keep themselves completely covered at all times. The women of some authority wear straw hats on the march which are circlets with a brim but no crown which they tie beneath their chins with anything serviceable, and with this they shield themselves from sun and rain when they travel on horseback.

The activity or occupation of the men is to hunt, in order to supply their families with meat, and to make the skin tents or huts in which they live, and all their clothing. They also take care of the horses they own and make all their riding gear. Their games are limited to dicing, to training in their manner of fighting, and to racing each other on horseback.

The women are obliged to cook the food, fetch water and firewood, put up and take down the tents when on the march and load and unload them. The men do not help at all in these chores, even if the

462 woman be sick, for she must somehow find the strength to do all this.
[342 281] In addition to these things she must sew the tent together, it being made always of the skins of full grown guanacos, and all the other skins which go to make bedding and clothing, these usually being made of hare, skunk or newly born or unborn guanacos. These small guanacos are collected and skinned in the springtime, and those in excess of the local need are bartered with the Indians of Rio Negro for horses, clothing, beaded halters and knives, which the latter acquire by trading or on their
438 periodic invasions of the Buenos Aires frontier. The fact is that the Indians whom we are here describing have never had dealings with Spaniards until the present date, nor have they seen any Spanish towns, nor do these regions contain iron, metal, brass, tools or arms - all these things must be acquired by the above mentioned trading. The women, in order to
[281 283] sew the skins together use awls which they make from the iron the Rio Negro Indians give them, and instead of thread they use nerves which they collect, as needed, from the legs of ostriches.

622 484 203 The chieftainship is hereditary and his authority absolute in regard to shifting the camp site in search of the game upon which they live. When the chief thinks that it is time to move he shouts out a speech in a loud voice from his tent the evening before the move is to be made. All the others listen to him with great attention, each from his own tent. He tells them that a move must be made on the following day, he assigns a time for rounding up [71] the horses, for striking the tents and for starting out; no one answers him, and at the assigned hour all are ready
484 as he has ordered. The women travel along paths which lead to the watering places where they are to stay; they are responsible for all the
224 baggage. The men, after the women have got under way, spread out and take their places in the surrounding region in order to enclose the guanacos and entangle them with the bolas as they attempt to break away. The guanacos cannot be chased, for they dash away headlong at such speed that no horse or dog can catch them. Once brought down by the bolas the dogs assist the Indians to finish them off. The chief himself assigns the position each Indian must take for the guanaco beat, for which
[622] in testimony of his overlordship, he is given part of the catch. The chief never takes active part in the hunt and does nothing other than go from
484 stand to stand. The longest day's journeys are of four leagues. On arriving at the assigned camping place the women put up the tents, col-
[313 462] lect firewood and have everything ready for the coming of the men. The latter, when the sun sets, go to their tents, and never have I seen any of them arrive at their tents after nightfall. If the march is to be continued on the following day the chief harangues his people in the same manner

484 as before, but if he says nothing, then all know that for the while they are to remain in that place. Their camp site is usually in the area to which they know that the game has moved. When the chief sees that meat is running low he gives orders at sundown, in the same manner as when ordering a move to a new camp site, that the horses are to be brought in at some specified time on the following day. Once this has been done he harangues them once more, this time on horseback, and assigns the hunting stations and all else which each group of hunters is to [462] do. Some women go with them to load the game, the men being unwilling to do even this chore. The tents are left standing and in them [92] the remaining women, children, and disabled Indians wait. At sundown they return to their tents once more. The chief's authority is limited 622 to these few activities only, and he never for any crime punishes his people, although in the aforementioned matters in which obedience is required it is never found that they do not fulfill his orders faithfully. When 721 623 he wants to wage war on his neighbors, or on some other group which may have insulted their honor, this can only be carried into effect with the approval of his chief subordinates, to which effect they meet together in the chief's tent. The latter mulls over and explains the wrongs which have been done, the way in which they can be avenged, forces, ease and difficulties entailed in the waging of the war. The members of the council confer about the matter and either approve or reject the proposal of the chief, who does not take offense if he is overruled. Usually the chief's bid for war is approved and the council merely discusses ways and means of waging it, and the time of its commencing. This discussion 721 203 often lasts some days. Once they are agreed on the matter of beginning hostilities the chief, on three successive nights, shouts the news in a loud voice from his tent so as to inform his people of the declaration of war, the time which has been set for its [72] commencement, the manner in which it is to be conducted, who are the enemies, the cause of the war, and they are warned to be wary and prepared.

721 One of the principle causes for the declaration of war is the fol- 423 lowing: Each chief's territory has fixed boundaries, and no Indian may cross into the territory of a neighbor without obtaining permission from 484 the latter to do so. The Indian who wishes to obtain such permission [202] must make three smoke signals, and until he is answered by three other smoke signals he may not approach the encampment. Once he has been answered he must give an account of himself to the chief in whose territory he is, telling his reasons for coming, be it only because he is passing through or because he wishes to take up residence there. If the chief so

desires he gives his permission, and if not, he orders him to leave his territory and dominions immediately. If the Indian is going as ambassador for his own chief or for some other group of Indians, either to ask permission to pass through the territory or to trade or to pay a call, he is told by the chief the time, the place of entry, the road to be followed in order to continue on their way or the land they are to occupy in order to do their trading. After all of this, the three smoke signals must be made again and once these are answered by the Indians whose territory they wish to enter, they all come; at about one league from the encampment the men come to a halt, the women go forward with the children, put up their tents in the spot which has been assigned to them and, all being in readiness, the men go forward and join the women. No one comes out to receive the newcomers, each group being in sight of the others for quite a long period until the chief or some other of the visitors goes to pay his respects to the host chief, who receives him in his tent in company of his principal lieutenants all of whom gather to welcome the stranger. This call often lasts a whole day since, as each speaks without being interrupted by anyone else, if the visitor brings much news and wishes also to learn all about the things of note in the territory, the speech of each individual present is liable to last two or three hours and even more as they also repeat certain words and phrases many times over. He who is listening, together with all who surround him, pays strict attention to what is said, saying with some frequency "ɛ," "ɛ," which means yes, yes, and with no other word do they interrupt the speaker. At these meetings alliances are made, general feelings of friendliness are exchanged and other contracts, pacts and agreements are concluded, in all of which the chiefs have absolute authority. When the formalities here described are not observed prior to entering the territory or camp of some other group, then the action is considered a sign of bad faith and a general alarm is sounded.

They also declare war on each other often for horse stealing, and as a result the vanquished are deprived of their horses, the young women and children are made captives and the old women together with the ablebodied men are given no quarter, unless they save themselves by escaping from their pursuers. [73]

The chief is under the obligation of protecting and aiding the Indians in his territory when they are in need, and so that chief is most popular and esteemed by his people who best is able to succor them, is most openhanded, and intelligent in the hunt. He who is lacking in these qualities is deserted by his followers in favor of one who possesses them, and is thus left only with his relatives and open to continual

invasion by his neighbors. As a matter of fact the unfortunate chief's family does not lose its right to its land, and with the passage of time it often happens that some descendant will re-establish the colony which his father, grandfather or brother destroyed either by bad luck or bad conduct. When a chief becomes old and unable to fulfill the obligations of his position he hands over his authority to a successor.

Marriages are made by a man's buying his wife from her father or from some other under whose guardianship she may be, and in proportion to her rank, good looks, conduct, etc. she is either more or less expensive. Her will is not taken into account for this transaction by her father or guardian, and she cannot set herself against her own sale. Each man may have one, two, or more wives of his own, depending on his wealth, but only rarely does a man have more than one unless he be a chief or an Indian of great power. Three is the greatest number of wives which any man gets to possess, and each husband has the right of selling his wives to another, but this resale makes the woman of little worth, and for that reason she is sold very cheaply; poor men only buy women in this way since they lack the funds to buy them first-hand. It is not considered improper to sell a woman to a relative, unless it be to the woman's son or brother, all other relatives being eligible as buyers. Many are the marriages of this type which are consumated because of the expense involved in procuring an unmarried woman. Single women, while they are yet young and have hopes of being married keep their virginity, but should these hopes vanish, they will have sex relations promiscuously. Those married women who find that the husband who bought them from their father or guardian is to their liking, are faithful, but should they not like their husbands they become troublesome -- yet adultery is not considered a crime unless committed in the husband's presence, and in such a case the adulterer and not the woman is blamed, and even then no punishment is meted out, the husband being easily mollified. The chief always has as a wife the daughter or sister of some other chief, and she is the head wife amongst his others, who must serve her in every way. Even if the chief should tire of his principal wife he may not sell her because it would be considered an insult and cause for an outbreak of war with her relatives. All these head wives are grave in demeanor, given to few words, live secluded in their tents, spend their time in pursuits suitable [74] to their position, and do not take part in the vain conversations of the other Indian women. The men never manhandle the women for any reason, except when drunk, and even in such a condition the chief will never strike his head wife, although all the others may well receive their share of blows.

The marriage ceremony, once the woman's price has been fixed 585
and paid, is limited to the father's taking her to the groom's tent, unless she herself goes off to the groom unattended, a thing which is not at all reprehensible. The groom then has a mare or two slaughtered, according to his means, and invites the bride's and his own male and female relatives and friends to eat the meat which, once done, the marriage ceremony is over.

Both the men and the women are very loving and devoted to their 854
children, whom, as soon as they are born, they bind about with many soft and pliable leather bands which they have in readiness. The babies are bound for over a month to a board made of many small sticks which are tied together and covered with hide. The Indians say that they grow up [142
straight in this way, and the fact is that both the men and the women are 516]
all very straight and well built, and none are ever seen whose shoulders are hunched. Once the babies are taken out of their bindings the mothers usually carry them about with them on their backs, the baby's head issuing from the same opening in the garment as the mother's. When on the march they make a sort of cradle out of hide and sticks, rounded over and sealed on all sides except for openings for the head and feet, which they line and embellish with flannel, cloth or anything they may have, and ornament with beads, bells, etc., as they may be able to, and they secure them on the horse's rump behind the mother. Children are never seen to weep amongst these people, unless they receive a blow or fall.

Their religion is limited to a sort of belief in two powers, one 776
benign, which has jurisdiction only over the heavens and is independent 778
from and without power on the earth and its inhabitants, of whom they [771]
take little notice; the other power is both benign and stern, and governs the earth, directing, chastening and rewarding its inhabitants. This power they worship in any guise in which they may represent it, or in the shape of some object found on the beach washed up from a shipwreck, such as masks from a ship's prow or fashion pieces from the stern, these being the preferred representations for their worship since they suppose them to have appeared by enchantment. This deity is called the Camalasque, which can be rendered as "powerful and valiant" [75]. Each person who has one of the figures defends it and believes that his is the true deity and those belonging to other Indians are false ones; yet disputes never flare up or get out of hand because they feel that the deity will itself bring down vengeance upon those who offend it. They believe that sickness and death are the [753
god's retribution, unless they occur in old age, in which case they are 76]
attributed to natural causes. These images are kept in the tents, completely wrapped up in skins, woolen cloth, flannel or linen, as each is [756]

able, and it is never uncovered for anyone unless by order of the pseudo 756 [776 778]
holy man or witch doctor, who may be either a man or a woman. This
person ordinarily has to practice his art daily, chanting to the deity to the [534]
accompaniment of two gourds filled with pebbles -- a type of music which
is as unpleasant as is his own voice. In this manner the witch doctor makes [781]
petitions to the deity to the effect that the group's enemies may sicken or
die. This often redounds in the witch doctor's undoing for should his in-
cantations be followed by some plague among the enemy, or some chief
or important person die amongst them, then the enemy group will try every
means to capture the witch doctor and make a devil's martyr of him. The
witch doctors must also chant to the deity in intercession for the sick in 755
their own camp in order to overrule the witch doctors among their enemies.
If the sick person is not brought back to health the sick one's friends often
will give the witch doctor his just deserts, at least by depriving him of his
occupation and treating him as of no repute in the future; if the wife or
son of a chief should die the witch doctor will often pay for his unsuccessful
cure with his life. The witch doctor's curative efforts are limited to chant-
ing, no other medicines being used in the curing of sickness. And so these 756
singing doctors encounter many hardships in their lives, there being but few
who die of natural causes, but nevertheless there are always many eager for
the job because they can have a free hand with the Indians' wives if the [837]
latter are willing, or, if the witch doctor be a woman, she can have re-
lations with the men. There are almost as many witch doctors as there are
families because as a rule the head of every household has an idol of his [778]
own in his tent, and if the camp is made up of four, five or more families,
there are an equal number of witch doctors or pseudo holy men -- let it be [592]
remembered that amongst the Indians a family is not composed only of man,
wife and children, but also of all of the relatives of the husband who is the
family head, and who is therefore a sort of subaltern chief under the one who
has general overlordship and property rights to the land.

When someone in the family becomes sick the family witch doctor 755
comes to chant in the person's very ear, in such loud and harsh tones that
the sounds alone might be enough to bring about his death. If the patient
gets worse [76] the witch doctor invites the participation of others of his
profession and all the old women, in order to help him in his chanting;
should the patient die no one other than the original witch doctor is held
responsible. Once the sick person is completely prostrated, if she be a virgin
and young, a tent of ponchos is made for her at some little distance from
the camp. She is put into it and there the chanting becomes louder because

She is put into it and there the chanting becomes louder because

every available crone joins in and one of them attaches to a stick all the bells she can lay hold of and, making a great noise with them, she takes a turn around the outside of the tent every once in a while, those within redoubling their shouting when this occurs. During the time of the person's sickness mares and horses are slaughtered as an offering or sacrifice to the idol in order to bring about the sick one's recovery; but this offering is then eaten by the invalid and the chanters.

If the invalid should die, either in the new poncho tent if she is a virgin, or in the home tent if it be a man or a married woman, the favorite horse is brought to the tent, is saddled and harnessed, and all the dead person's valuables are placed on it. A boy is then mounted on the horse and made to ride once around the tent in which the corpse is lying. The boy is then taken off the horse and a noose is placed over the horse's neck from the two ends of which two Indians pull until the horse is choked to death. A bonfire being already prepared, the horse's trappings and valuables are hurled into it and the person who heads the funeral proceedings starts to take off all his clothes and all else he has on and hurls them into the fire, and all the deceased's relatives and friends throw some article of clothing into the flames, either a garment which they have brought for the purpose from their tents or else they take off a garment on the spot, each competing with the others as to the value of the articles thrown into the fire, by which they demonstrate greater obligation to the deceased, or deeper friendship, etc. Then they disembowel the throttled horse and the meat is distributed amongst all those who have thrown garments into the fire. The bereaved remains in her tent, completely covered up and silent. All the women relatives and friends go to keep them [sic] company, and in order to do this they cut big locks of hair from their heads so that their hair hangs down over their foreheads up to their eyebrows; they claw their faces, scarify their cheeks, weep even if they do not really feel like doing so, and indulge in wailing and other expressions of sorrow so pitiable and heart-rending that it seems that their very hearts would break. The old crones take over the body at night and bury it where it seems best to them, the whereabouts of the burial place being withheld from the mourners and from all others, and if the old women are asked to reveal the place where the body has been laid they are not allowed to do so. The mourning goes on for fifteen days, with the same moaning, and every day horses belonging to the deceased are slaughtered until not one is left, as all his goods are to be destroyed and cannot be given away to anyone, and nobody would receive them anyway knowing that their owner was dead because this is a sacred matter [77] for them, and inviolable.

[sic. may sick virgin.- Aunt/st]

755 [534] [782] 764 [765] 765 768 766

Every moon a day of mourning and weeping is repeated, and a horse or 775
mare is slaughtered if a friend or relative can be found who will donate one, since the deceased no longer has any. On the first anniversary a three-day mourning period is observed, with weeping, a bonfire into which offerings are thrown, and as many of the other ceremonies which were done on the day of death as can be, as a memorial to it. After these three days are passed they forget all about the deceased person, and that is the end of the matter. All this funeral pomp and ceremony is done only for young or mature and robust persons, while for those who die in old age there is no mourning or weeping, the belief being [488]
that their death was necessary, and so only one horse is killed, and at that the worst and of least value from among the deceased's herd.

Horses are killed for weddings and deaths, on the occasion of a 782
child's teething, when the menstruation period starts in women, for any minor evil, to placate the idol when it is angry, which they believe is the case when they become sick, when the taking of game is very difficult, when other Indians harass them and they are themselves not strong enough to declare war -- when they are not strong enough to war with others they endure any wrong the others care to do to them. And all this slaughter of horses and mares is the reason why the whole region is not full of horses, for although the mares foal every year, the Indians kill so many mares that they do not have enough horses for their needs and must make up the difference by trading for them with the Pampas Indians of Buenos Aires. In order to replenish their stock of horses [439]
they bring hides with them when they come down to the Rio Negro, and exchange them for these animals, from which it happens that the Indians of San Julian have less horses than those of the gulfs of San Jorge and Santa Elena, because they cannot go down to the Rio Negro as often as the former can.

They believe in the transmigration of the soul, and that the souls 775
of those who die pass back into the babies who are born into the same family, and in this way: If a person dies in old age his soul transmigrates without having to wait, and that is why he is not wept for or mourned since they say that the soul is passing into a more fortunate life; but the soul of one who dies young and strong remains detained beneath the earth and is fated to sojourn there a length of time equal to that which would have been required for him to reach old age. Once this time is fulfilled his soul passes into the next-born infant. It is be- 775
cause of this long wait during which it is thought that the soul is cramped 782
and strained, that they make so many sacrifices to the idol, in order that

he ease the soul's distress somewhat until the decreed time comes around. They are so superstitious in this matter that some are persuaded that it is desirable to put a little food and valuables in the grave so that the souls of the deceased may eat and entertain themselves; others think that this is fruitless, believing that the idol will supply them with all that is necessary. This matter is ordered in each [78] family according to the opinion of the imposter witch doctor, who deceives himself and hoodwinks the others as he pleases, no notice being taken of his inconsistencies, even when his thoughts and his commands are seen to be continually at variance. These liars make the others believe that the idol makes signs with its hands, and that it speaks, and then they repeat what they say they have heard the idol say, before the people are present at the time when the witch doctor unwraps the idol, and they see with their own eyes that it is a lie, if the witch doctor says that it has spoken or gesticulated, that is enough for them to believe the thing blindly.

They are of the opinion that nothing they can do can offend the deity they worship in any way, and so they believe that the adversities and punishments which he sends them are not because they have deserved them because of their transgressions, but because the idol just gets it into its head to treat them badly. Thus the graciousness of this power consists in having good horses, health and peace, in finding plentiful game, and in the faithfulness of their neighbors.

The number of Indians who are here settled is about 4,000 persons. They occupy the territory on the coast which has already been indicated. They cannot leave this region because they are hemmed in on the east by the sea, on the north by the Rio Negro and the Pampas Indians of Buenos Aires, and on the west and south by the mountain chain which it is impossible to cross owing to its height and because it is covered with snow the year round. So forbidding are these mountains that they are to all intents uninhabited, even by birds.

In all this land there is absolutely no lumber for construction purposes, but there is an abundance of firewood on all hands, good for burning, and the greater part of the ground is covered with sabine, torbisco, thyme and gomieles. All the land is rugged and cut up into hills, gullies and valleys. One of these latter is to be found twenty leagues away from San Julian, and is a very pleasant place which the Indians call Oenna. There are in it innumerable springs with good water. In most of the gullies and valleys springs are to be met with at a distance of one, two, three or four leagues from the shore. It is improbable that these parts

It is improbable that these parts
contain metals, because if there were metal here the Indians would have 135
found it and put it to use; and they would naturally have come upon it
at one time or another as they are never in one place very long, changing
from one site to another in order to subsist on the game which, according
to season, moves inland or comes down to the beaches.

The weapons which they use are the bolas and the lasso, and also 411
knives and sabers which they acquire from the Pampas Indians of Buenos [439]
Aires or [79] else make themselves from any piece of iron given them 325
and which they regard highly for this reason. They also sometimes find
iron on the beaches, the remains of wrecked ships. It requires a great
deal of effort on their part to make one of these weapons because, even
though they heat the iron by fire, as they have no tools they can only
avail themselves of stones to beat it into shape then they must grind it
by hand and trim it on the rocks and give it a sharp edge and a point.

In their battles they fight on foot, leaving the women in charge 726
of the horses. They put on garments similar to men's shirts, with tight [714]
sleeves, made out of ten or twelve well-worked deer hides which no
knife or saber can penetrate. They put a sort of hat or helmet upon their
heads made of horse or bullock hide, shielded with which they attempt
to slash the enemies' legs and cut through their boots, they being more
vulnerable there. They are very resolute and persevering in battle and
do not abandon the field once upon it until they are either overpowered
or killed. They also use the bolas, and every person who is overcome is
usually killed because they become so zealous and cruel in battle that
they will not give up. This is why this region is not more thickly popu- [164
lated, for the women are very fecund and few diseases bother them. 842]

From Santa Elena to the Rio Negro the Indians say that the land 133
is parched and waterless and only in the rainy season can a few small
lakes be found. When these are dry they are obliged, when they wish 487
to go to the Rio Negro, to travel inland towards the mountains where
there are springs. As they have to travel uphill far to the west to do this
the distance is three times greater when they wish to come down to the
Spanish settlement, compared to the coastal road, if this latter had water.

The tents are pitched by sticking two poles about two or three 342
yards long into the ground, about four and a half feet from each other;
beside each pole and at an equal distance from it, they thrust two shorter
poles into the ground. To the west of these six they place six shorter ones
at an equal distance, and to the west of these at the same distance, six
others a little more than three feet long. Upon these eighteen poles they
place the hide with the hair outward, and secure it to the upper end of all
of the poles. From each pole they hang, on the inside, as it were curtains
of hide which form the necessary divisions. These curtains are tied to the

poles from top to bottom and make firm partitions. On the outside 342
the hide touches the ground on the north, west and south. The entrance
is always left facing east and is as wide as the entire tent, which is in
the shape of an oval cave. Nothing whatever is placed at the entrance
to close it except [80] in freezing weather, when it is closed by hanging
a hide across it. The inner partitions are arranged from the center to- 342
ward the back for each married couple, and the children and other 582
family members and relatives sleep all in a jumble in the remaining
part which is no man's land up to the door. Here widowers, widows,
unmarried men and women, relatives, servants and slaves and, in fact,
as many as are dependent on or related to the head or master of the
tent, come together. Virgins here, in spite of the opportunity try, as 836
has been said, to keep their virginity while they have hope of getting 837
married; but if they should lose this hope they will take any man
indiscriminately, and they and the widows spend the night merrily,
taking up with the first man who cares to sleep with them.

Quarrels between men belonging to the same camp are decided 627
by coming to blows with their fists and hands. They are not allowed to 578
use any weapons, and no one dares to separate them until they give in
or separate on their own accord. The onlookers applaud them and
laugh. When women fight they begin in a sitting posture, to say of- [516]
fensive words to each other until one of them starts to unbraid her hair
very calmly, at which the other does likewise, still keeping up the flow
of insults. As soon as both have loosed their hair, they shake it, get up
and charge furiously, tugging hard on each other's hair and yanking out
as much of it as they can as it tangles in their nails. The other women
and men just look at them, not daring to pull them apart. When they
become exhausted they themselves separate and are as good friends as
a result of this as though they had not fought. They allow their hair to
remain loose for the remainder of the day. The women may not strike
each other in their fights with hands or fists as do the men, nor may
they pull or tear each other's clothes, only their hair, and should they
do otherwise they are corrected by the surrounding spectators.

In time of sorrow, on the march, on very windy days, when it 302
is very cold or freezing, the Indians paint their faces black or violet, 751
the men as well as the women, to keep their skin from chapping.

Usually these Indians are of a sweet and innocent nature, and [157]
they became so attached to me and they treated me with such simplic- 123
ity, especially the chief of San Julian, that had we had enough horses
I believe there would not be a span of those lands which I would not
have been able to explore in their company.

Buenos Aires, December 10, 1783
Antonio de Viedma [81]